

An interview with James F. Conover 1.

JAMES F. CONOVER

An Interview Conducted by
Harry Frey
August 20, 1980

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

08/20/80

DATE

Name of narrator: James F. Conover
Address: 2635 North 10th St. Phone: 466-3809
Birthdate: 1898 Birthplace: Terre Haute
Length of residence in Terre Haute: Life
Education: Through Master's degree

Occupational history: High school teacher, high school coach,
high school principal.

Special interests, activities, etc. Problems of retired
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JAMES F. CONOVER

Tape 1

August 20, 1980

Vigo County Public Library Conference Room

INTERVIEWER: Harry Frey

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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HF: The interviewer on this portion of the Oral History program is Harry Frey, and the narrator on this interview is James Conover. The date is August 20, 1980. Location is the Vigo County Library conference room.

I'm going to call you Jim 'cause I've known you a long time, if you don't object.

CONOVER: That's my name.

HF: Right. Jim, I wonder if we could start out with a little about your family background and where you started your schooling.

CONOVER: I was born in Terre Haute in 1898. My father at that time was a fireman on the Pennsylvania Railroad. Later on he became a brick mason and foreman in brick construction and worked on some of the outstanding buildings in our community. We lived across the street from Collett Park. I entered Collett School and graduated from Collett School. I had some interesting experiences there but probably the one that I'll remember the most is a teacher named Sally Dawson I had in the fourth grade who interested all of us in nature and nature study. She used to take the members of the class on hikes along the towpath. And I'll always remember the spring that she revealed the Virginia bluebells to us. I thought that was the most beautiful color I'd ever seen, and that was the beginning of my interest in horticulture. I enjoyed my experience. I remember Phil E. Templeton who was a member of my class at Collett. We used to, at recess, get on an ash pile back of the building, and we'd form a whip. Then we'd snap the whip and the one on the end would have to let loose. Phil was on the end this particular day, and he hit a tree, and that's when he fractured his nose. Phil was one of those persons in the community that enjoyed working with everyone, but that was a terrible thing to have happen.

HF: That's the Phil Templeton in the coal business?

CONOVER: Yes.

HF: How about your early schooling, Jim, elementary school and so forth? Where did you go to school? You mentioned Collett; then from there on?

CONOVER: I was in Collett, of course, eight years, and then I entered Garfield as a freshman the day they opened the doors for the first time. I graduated from Garfield [in June, 1916] in the first class [to attend four years.] Indiana State [University] was Normal then because all they taught there was education [to] people going into the field of teaching. I finally completed my work there in 1926 [having served in the Armed Forces in 1918-19]. Later on I decided during the Depression years that I ought to get my master's [degree], so I went over to Columbia [University].

"Rusty" [Vane R.] Rutherford and I -- both from Terre Haute -- were there at the same time. We earned our master's at Columbia.

HF: Let's go back to Garfield. [Before] Garfield there was only one high school in Terre Haute. That was Wiley High School, right? How did Garfield get started?

CONOVER: Well, in 1908 there were a group of men in the north end -- the ones I recall were Mr. [E. E.] Dix, Nate [N. G.] Wallace, who had the grocery store in Twelve Points [1280 Lafayette Avenue], Herbert Briggs, who was in education -- men like that -- and Mr. [Manford] Kindle. They used to meet in a cigar store. The north end had two cigar stores -- one at 10th and Beech [Streets] and one at Twelve Points. The DePeugh family had the one at Twelve Points. It was really the meeting place on the north end of town.

These people would meet there and chew the fat. Strange thing, they always had the news that was going on before the newspapers hit the street. Well, they got to talking about the need for a north end high school after a streetcar going down 6th Street was hit by a train at 6th and the Pennsylvania Railroad. From that time on there was agitation to get a school in the north end. They used that [the streetcar accident] as an excuse. They really wanted their own school.

CONOVER: But in 1908, the school board was not elected; it was appointed. A bill passed the General Assembly in Indiana at that time that gave cities of 25,000 to 40,000 citizens the right to elect their school boards. And the only two cities that qualified for that were Terre Haute and Hammond. That bill passed the legislature, and finally we got it to the place in Terre Haute where it was to be adopted. There were several lawsuits to try to prevent that, but eventually they passed the bill. That was one of the things that really helped the community get an elected school board.

A location for a school in the north end became a problem. There was some thought that where McLean [Junior High School, 961 Lafayette Avenue] eventually was located was the place to put the high school. Well, the people in the south end were opposing the high school entirely. Even Mr. [William H.] Wiley, [for whom] the only high school we had was named, showed some opposition. But things got so hot that after Mr. Wiley had retired, they [the school board] brought him back as superintendent while this controversy was going on.

The lawsuit prevented the building of the school at the McLean site so the people in the north end first thought then of 13th [Street] and Maple [Avenue]. Then they figured, no, that won't do because that's right in the heart of the business district. (See, the first really business section outside of downtown was the Twelve Points area.) So these men -- these four men plus two or three others went over to 12th and Maple. There were three houses standing there at that time; four different people owned the land. They got the approval of the people to sell the property. They moved the houses and made the land available. So that's how the site was determined.

HF: You . . . while you were in high school your first interest in athletics, I think, developed. Would you tell us something about that?

CONOVER: Well, (laughs) I lived by Collett Park, and all boys [that] lived around there always got together. We used to take hikes on Sunday. We'd hike up the Wabash River along the Southern Indiana Railroad. We'd walk across that bridge. Many times we'd take hikes on Sunday over to St. Mary's [St. Mary of the Woods College] and back. A lot of time we were trotting. Well, trotting today is something people feel is essential. We were doing it 'way back in those days, and I got a natural feeling about athletics. So I came out for track when I was a sophomore, and I remember Chester Smith was the sprinter [on the team]. In the first meet we had, I beat him about five yards, and he came back and said, "Look. Don't you ever again let me feel that I can beat you." He said, "You're fast. Now you keep running." That gave me confidence.

Well, the next year I was a junior. I won the state championship. I never had a coach, but I will always remember what happened the day before I went [to] the state meet. The coach that we had in Terre Haute was down at Wiley -- a man named Wann and his brother was in charge of the YMCA. He came up to give me instructions on how to start. Well, it was all against the way I started, so I listened to him. Then, after he left I said to myself, "I can't do that." So I started my own way. But I was fortunate. When I got over to the state meet [in Indianapolis], it was . . . The state meet was held over at the old . . . I can't remember the name of the league, the league that left the big leagues and started their league, and Mordecai Brown was one of the pitchers. [Federal League] Their field was out on West Washington Street. They'd just built the track that spring, and it was real soft. It was terrible, and you had to run the hundred [yard dash] three times [and] the two-twenty [yard dash] three times in two hours. When the final on the hundred came around, Hez [Hezekiah] Clark, who had been athletic director at Rose [Polytechnic Institute], now Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, was the starter. He came around to my tent (he knew me), and he said, "Now, look. When you get down to start, you're gonna

CONOVER: have the state champion last year in the hundred and the one on the two-twenty right next to you. Don't listen to anything they say. They'll try to get your mind off starting." I appreciated that because that's what they tried to do, and I didn't pay any attention. So Hez helped me (laughs) by telling me that which was not a violation of the rules. But it did help.

HF: Now, when was this, Jim?

CONOVER: 1915. The next year when I was a senior, I tore a muscle in my leg and wasn't able to compete. That was in 1916.

HF: But you won the state championship in . . .

CONOVER: Hundred and two-twenty yard dashes.

HF: In both races?

CONOVER: Yeah. And placed Garfield third in the state championship by doing that.

HF: How was education in high school at that time? Can you compare it to high schools now?

CONOVER: Yes. We were real fortunate at Garfield, in a way. We had all new teachers and young teachers. The first principal was a man named Albert E. Highley. He came from north central Indiana, and he left after his first year to become superintendent of schools in his hometown. But he was good at organizing. The young teachers wanted to see that Garfield became a real good school, and they were dedicated people.

We had very little in the way of vocational courses -- practically nothing. The one thing we were permitted beyond woodwork and mechanical drawing was a print shop. I believe we had the first print shop in Terre Haute schools. Most of our courses were called either general or academic. The ones pupils that expected to go to college, of course, took academic and some of the others.

The first graduating class -- the class of 1913 which started in '12 I believe -- had only nine boys. The rest were girls, because the boys stayed at Wiley because of athletics.

CONOVER: We started our own football scrub team up there at that time. We got a team together and finally played Wiley that year. They won the game -- I believe it was 59 to 0 -- but had to forfeit it because they'd played an ineligible player. Then they refused to play Garfield for the next two years. So in 1915 when we won that first 7 to 6 game, it was a grudge game, really (laughs) because they hadn't wanted to recognize us at all.

The academic part of it, we were really fortunate. We had outstanding teachers. We had Mary Hill Sankey -- it was Mary Hill at that time [who] headed the English department. We had Mr. [Edward E.] Hylton who headed the math department [and was principal later]. They were all people that really knew what they were doing and knew how to organize the departments.

I can remember the first class that I had with Miss Hill (that was later Mrs. Hill Sankey). We had a boy in the class who was an athlete, and he thought he was pretty smart. Her name was Hill. He put his hand up and she called on him -- Frank Nitterhouse -- "What is it, Frank?" [He said,] "Do you spell your name with an 'e' or an 'i'?" At that point, everybody in that school learned that Miss Hill didn't stand for any foolishness. And it was the fact that she established that that made her an outstanding English teacher because she would not settle for mediocrity.

HF: Apparently, since there was opposition to starting Garfield high School, there were probably people who thought there wouldn't be enough students to go there. This didn't turn out to be the case, did it?

CONOVER: Oh, the people in the north end . . . one of the points they made in requesting the high school was that we have young people in the north end in Terre Haute that won't make that trip clear down to Wiley, that won't go to school, and that they would if we had a school in the north end. Well, I think the people who were opposed to the new school didn't believe that.

CONOVER: When they opened the doors that fall -- that first fall -- Wiley had more students than they had the year before plus the students that were at Garfield, which seemed to indicate that the people in the north end knew what they were talking about.

We didn't have too many in the senior class because most of the boys stayed at Wiley, but the sophomore and freshman classes were large. When we graduated our first full four years, we had one of the largest classes Garfield ever graduated. Because people wanted to go to school, and they stayed in fairly well. We didn't have near as many dropouts as you might think. See, a youngster at that time, when Garfield first started, wasn't mandated to stay in school 'til he was 16. He could get a job at 14. That was all right. He could drop out. But during those years then the national government passed a law mandating that students stay in school [until age 16].

We were fortunate to have teachers dedicated, that believed in it [Garfield], and wanted to see it go. And I remember that first game of 7 to 6. Jim Comoford was a druggist at West's Drug Store [southwest corner of Maple and Lafayette Avenues]. He saw the day before the game that we were all downhearted. He went out and took up money and bought a beautiful trophy. How he got it that night before the game, I don't know. But before we started to play that next day, he showed that trophy to the boys, and they went out there, and they beat Wiley 7 to 6. They weren't expected to either!

HF: Was that the beginning then of the Spirit of 7-6 slogan?

CONOVER: Well, Garfield defeated Wiley about eight times, I believe, with a score of 7 to 6. They defeated them in 1915 and the next time in 1917. Really Jim Comoford in the celebration following that first victory used the phrase 7 to 6. Of course, it sounded good and everybody in the north end bought it. But the true Spirit of 7-6 started with this small group of north end citizens that wanted a high school and with a faculty that wanted to make good. It was a continual fight for recognition. But I think they did it in a good way, and I think

CONOVER: Garfield became an innovative high school mainly because of the enthusiasm and the dedication. Right from the beginning the doors were open to all of the patrons of the school. Neighbors could come in, anyone could come in and sit down and talk. That wasn't true everywhere at that time.

HF: What led to your teaching career then?

CONOVER: Well, I have a feeling wanting to play in athletics led to it. I wanted to play basketball; I really wasn't concerned about teaching. I didn't even think about it. Birch Bayh, the senator's father, was my basketball coach down at Normal then -- Indiana State. Birch was just a few years older than the players on the team. But Birch was one of those that wanted us to enjoy the game as well as to play it, and we had the benefit of having someone that really appreciated the learning aspects that came out of athletics.

Then I . . . after I'd played one year there -- one season -- I joined the services in World War I. When I came back, it was just natural that I'd go back and play basketball. I'd had an operation that prevented me from playing after my second year on the team. But I enjoyed athletics, and I can remember I always thought about Normal, as we called it at that time. When I was in high school, we took the Garfield High School track team down and met the Normal team, and we beat them on their field. So that gave me a little feeling about the importance of track. 'Course I've always felt that athletics was meant to teach young people how to live a good life, how to respect constituted authority, how to discipline oneself, how to be in condition to do the things we should, how to recognize the other fellow's rights, and what good citizenship was. I believe it to this day. It should be used that way, and I think Garfield down through the years . . . I believe the other schools in Terre Haute have had coaches that have that attitude about athletics.

HF: Then you became a teacher at Garfield, right?

CONOVER: No. When I first became a part of the school system, I was employed to go around to the elementary schools to start introducing physical education.

CONOVER: We didn't have much at that time. When wars come on and they [administrators] have to tighten the belts, these are the things that they begin to take away from the curriculum. So we were putting it back, and Birch Bayh had been employed as the director of physical education and recreation in the city schools of Terre Haute. He had left Normal and come over to the city schools. The first year I spent going around to all the elementary schools trying to get a physical education program started.

HF: This was when?

CONOVER: This was 1923 -- '22 and '23. We also were trying to start recreation in the summer time, and Birch Bayh was in charge of that. Little did I think that later on when World War II started that I would be asked to do the same thing.

When World War II came along, I had a job down at the south [defense] plant. It was paying me far more for the summer per week than I was making in my school job. And I'd been there just one week when I got a call from George Carroll. I went down to his office, and he said, "You know many of the mothers are working, and they're not home, and the fathers are working -- some [have] gone into service. We need to start a summer recreation program."

Well . . . they wanted me to head it, and I said I'd be glad to. Well, little did I think he was gonna pay me one-third of what I was getting now and not pay for the gasoline I had to use to go around, but I understood. He, too, was giving a lot to the school system.

I'd like to say this about George Carroll. George Carroll had a reputation through Indiana that really meant something for the teachers in Terre Haute. During the Depression he was the only superintendent, I believe, that met the payrolls of the teachers every year during that Depression and every payroll. And this meant a lot to the teachers at that time. People who have lived through a depression can understand what that meant. The average citizen today doesn't have any idea what I hope we never have another one of them.

HF: Now from that kind of position where did you go in the teaching profession then?

CONOVER: Well, I had an opportunity to go to Garfield then in the fall in '23 [1920]. When I was down at Normal playing on the team, [E.] Bernard Clogston, who was coaching Garfield, had had a health problem. He had to leave. So they asked me if I would come up, and I worked with the [basketball] team then. My brother -- younger brother [Harry] was on that team, so I was with them all but the first two games. We had a good season. And I think that season helped the administration make a decision for me to go to Garfield as a basketball coach.

HF: So you started then at Garfield as a basketball coach, right?

CONOVER: Yes, and assistant to Earl Pike in football. See, we had two gyms at Garfield. Probably the only real successful teams we had in the early years were our girls basketball teams -- first two or three years. We had an outstanding girls' basketball team. [Harold] Babe Wheeler's (who later on made all-State and played at Purdue) sister was the star of the girls' basketball team at Garfield.

But in 1924 the state [Athletic Association] made a ruling that girls' teams could no longer play interscholastic athletics, so that was the end of the girls' basketball teams until recently.

HF: How did the teams travel in those days? Was there many games outside of the immediate area?

CONOVER: I think the farthest we ever traveled was probably Sullivan. We went on the interurban to Sullivan, Brazil, and Clinton. Oh, no! One time we did go . . . we went down to Sullivan. We took the railroad train over to Linton. That's the only way we had to get around. I remember one football [basketball] game at Clinton. They told us when the game was over, "Run for the interurban, and leave your football [basketball] uniforms (laughs) on."

There used to be some rough games that went on. It wasn't the school administrators that caused this or the coaches; it was some of the citizens.

CONOVER: There were rough days back in those days. There was a lot of betting on the ball games that went on. But really when it was all over, then people would shake hands. They were good sports about it. Our traveling was almost confined to the inter-urbans [in the first few years].

HF: Because of the . . . probably costs and everything else involved?

CONOVER: Well, no. There were very few people that had automobiles in those days. They . . . I even remember some of the teachers driving to school in horse and buggies the first few years. There were very few families had automobiles at all. Of course youngsters walked to school. We didn't have buses to take us. Wiley didn't either.

HF: Did they use the streetcars any?

CONOVER: Well, we used streetcars When I was coaching, we had those very small gyms at Garfield. People thought they were going to be swimming pools instead of gyms. They had a boys' and a girls' gym. Well, it got to the place when all the gyms were larger, that we had to go to Wiley to practice after they built the Wiley gym. We would give our youngsters tokens for the streetcars -- ten cents twice a week. That's all the practice we got in basketball. Tried to have a season of basketball with practice down there twice a week. But they enjoyed it. This was during the Depression during some of the worst times that we had.

In the early days . . . I was talking to Earl Pike the other day about the early days of football. He said, "Do you remember that I . . . you said that you'd go over there [to the school] with me once in a while on Saturdays and Sundays, and we'd nail cleats on the football shoes?" I said, "I certainly do!" Those cleats were made of leather. He would nail them on a foot. I said, "Earl, how many years did you go . . . (I remember 1924) before you were able to get new uniforms?" He said, "Three years."

And I know when I was coaching the boys, it was three and four years before they'd get new basketball uniforms. They'd have to take them home

CONOVER: and wash them up themselves. We had three basketballs. One was kept for the game. The other two to practice. That was how tough it was in the early days.

HF: How was it financed?

CONOVER: Well, football -- the football season carried basketball and track, and if we had it, baseball. It all had to come in the gate at football. There wasn't a large attendance at basketball in those days.

It got to the place though that the Garfield-Wiley Thanksgiving Day game had to foot the bill for the entire year for the athletic program. And we used to have some real good attendances out at the stadium after it once opened up. Our first few years that I was up there . . . well, when I was in high school, we played out at the old Three-I league baseball park, which was on the south side of Wabash Avenue, out where Topps store was at one time. Then the stadium was built, and I remember the largest crowd that ever saw a game in the Wabash Valley was the opening game which ended in a tie. Neither team scored. It was a really fine ball game.

Well, Thanksgiving Day receipts during that period of years following that financed the years' programs. Usually the weather was pretty good (but then four straight years of miserable weather occurred). Somehow I was the one that got stuck with the job of having to try to encourage the people to change the date earlier. When I went to Garfield as principal, we were going through a period when Thanksgiving Day weather was terrible. We played games out there when it was below freezing. Members of the band would have their lips stick to the horns and tear the skin off, and they'd bleed. It was that bad. So, the people quit going to the games. I mean, they wouldn't attend when the weather was that bad. So we figured if we were going to keep our heads above water financially, we'd have to do something about it. Well, when we recommended to the administration that we needed to change, to play earlier, the fans -- the real loyal fans -- started raising Cain. They really raised Cain! We were told then that we had to meet with the representatives of Wiley and Garfield booster clubs.

CONOVER: We met down at the administration building, and I was to be the one in charge of the meeting. We listened to them and they really told us what they thought. After about an hour I finally said, "Well, do you feel that 2 o'clock on Thanksgiving Day is the only time that you can really create enthusiasm and pep in this community?" Well, they thought that 2 o'clock on Turkey Day was important.

"Well," I said, "All right. I've got a suggestion. We'll take the last ten years, and we'll pick the first five of those ten years and take the average gate; then we'll take the average gate of the last five. We'll subtract the difference and if you're willing to underwrite the Thanksgiving Day game for that difference every year we have trouble, we'll stay with Thanksgiving." .

Not a soul spoke up and was willing to underwrite it.

Well, really, it was tough to lose that date, because the enthusiasm was terrific around here. You couldn't get through 7th and Wabash on the night before Thanksgiving for the youngsters were up there whooping it up, and they used to have beautiful parades. It was something. The pep was something, but we had to save our necks financially.

HF: Now, there was no effort to work that into the budget then? It was all done by raising money from the . . .

CONOVER: All athletic programs -- that is, financial support -- came from the gate. I've never believed in deficit spending. I was opposed to that. I can remember when our first Big Ten coaches came in. One of them came to Garfield, and one of the finest coaches I think we ever had in basketball and I know we've had some good ones (I admire Howard Sharpe athletic director at North High School, formerly basketball coach at Gerstmeier Technical School in what he's contributed to basketball) but I think Willard Kehrt was the first coach around here who knew how to handle big men, and he did a real good job of it. But Willard ordered three sets of uniforms and I didn't know it. The manager come up and told me. I went down to Willard (laughs), and I said, "Where in the world we gonna get the money to pay for this?"

CONOVER: . And, Willard, of course, he said, "Well, that's the way we've done in the Big Ten." And I, of course, knew that's the way they had done. Well, he was willing. He sent back two sets. He was really fine about it and he understood. But it wasn't long until he had generated enough enthusiasm he was able to get those extra sets through the gate /receipts/. It was rough going in the early days. Football had to carry it all.

HF: How about outstanding athletes that you were . . . either coached or knew at that time?

CONOVER: Well, in the beginning some of the early outstanding athletes . . . of course, I didn't coach them, but Babe Wheeler was an outstanding basketball player. He went to Purdue and became all-American. He was all-state; he was on the team that played the finals against Franklin. That was the first Garfield team that went to State.

In football I remember Paul Humphrey. Paul wasn't very big when he played in high school, but he had a spirit and a will. And I remember when he went to Purdue, he had two men that were supposed to be better than he was, but before the season was half over in his first year he proved he was a better player.

And George Van Bibber was an outstanding player. Probably, the best all-around athlete that we ever had at /Garfield/. We had a boy that potentially could have been terrific. He died in his junior year with an appendectomy when they didn't know much about it. His family opposed it /the operation/, and they held off too long. When they operated, gangrene had set in. His name was Bruno Beckish. He was headed for Notre Dame; he was outstanding in every respect.

But the outstanding athlete that I know of was Terry Dischinger. Terry Dischinger had speed; he certainly knew how to handle himself for a tall boy and he had brains. He was straight "A" student all through high school. I understand at Purdue he was a straight "A."

We've had some great athletes, individual stars that didn't get much chance to go on. Some

CONOVER: during the Depression period. I remember Andy Grant. If Andy Grant had been able to go ahead and follow up, he could have been a great athlete.

I could name a -- oh, to go down the line The first coach we had . . . when they looked out on the field and found a group of kids back there trying to play football. So the principal -- that was Mr. Highley -- went into Mr. [S. R.] Powers, who was teaching chemistry, and asked him if he'd coach. So he [Powers] coached them. He tried to help 'em out. Well, they decided the next year they had to get an [experienced] coach, and that's when they started with Clogston. They took him out of the classroom. Powers, by the way, went on to Columbia University and became one of the outstanding men in the field of teaching chemistry throughout the world. It was this red-haired Powers that was the first coach at Garfield.

When we get into outstanding people in athletics, I think our program in athletics was one that encouraged youngsters to do the best they could, but they never elevated the youngster -- no matter what his honors were -- above the rest of the students. I think that was good for the students, that was good for the athletes. I've had some of 'em tell me that later on.

HF: Now you became principal of Garfield then, didn't you finally?

CONOVER: Yes. I became principal after Mr. [E. E.] Hylton retired. Mr. Hylton became principal after Mr. [Charles] Zimmerman was deceased. Zimmerman had been a leader [in the Wabash Valley]. He was a little short man, but he had been a leader in athletics. He promoted athletics, but I'll always remember the time that Mr. Zimmerman didn't have one word to say. It was right after a Garfield-Wiley game, and we came down to Garfield to get dressed to go out to the game [at the stadium]. W's had been painted all over the front of the building and on the annex building. Mr. Zimmerman was real upset. [The paint was] a brilliant red and, you know, it soaks into the concrete, and you can't get it off.

CONOVER: Well, on Monday morning he called Mr. W. Scott Forney. Mr. Forney principal of Wiley High School, 1927-51 came up, and I sat in the office with them when they talked. And it was the first time I really ever saw Mr. Zimmerman upset. And he said what he thought.

Mr. Forney sat there quietly and when he got through -- Mr. Zimmerman finished -- Mr. Forney said, "Well, Mr. Zimmerman, I know how you feel." He said, "Last Wednesday I came out of the Wiley gym after our pep rally and I was hit by an egg."

That's the first time Mr. Zimmerman had known about that, and he was so upset; he was ashamed (laughs) he had made an issue of it, because Mr. Zimmerman was a really good . . . he was a gentleman in every respect and a good sportsman. He never did find out . . . I believe he never found out who did it. I found out later on it was two of the boys that made our honor society that threw those eggs. And they found out where they bought the paint at Wiley and made 'em come up and try to take the paint off. But you could never get it all off. It was somethin'. But that was one of the things that went along with the pep and enthusiasm of getting ready for that ball game.

HF: How about outstanding seasons? Any ones that stand out in your memory?

CONOVER: Seasons?

HF: Um hm..

CONOVER: Well, I remember . . . I remember one season when the enthusiasm was so high that we were going to play Reitz of Evansville at Evansville. We had a mothers' club, we had a pep club, a boosters' club. We had a number of clubs backing athletics. One thousand thirty-eight citizens of Terre Haute boarded a C & E.I. railroad train -- 11 cars -- and went down to see that game at Evansville. Now that was something to have that many people go down for one ball game!

Another year that really was outstanding, Thorval Mattox had come to Terre Haute from

CONOVER: Ball State to coach, and he had the only undefeated, untied record of any of the coaches. Earl Pike had an outstanding record. Earl was a good fundamental coach, but he had a couple of seasons where he had a tie game or so.

The outstanding event I'll always remember was the year we won 31 straight basketball games and then lost finally in the final game. I remember the request for tickets. You just can't believe how many people wanted tickets. And I had appointed Mr. Jones -- Orville Jones -- as athletic manager 'cause I knew that he would not deviate from our rules.

HF: When was this, Jim?

CONOVER: This was the year they Garfield went to the state finals. 19/47, I believe -- yeah, '47. What happened was that we had set up these rules. The first tickets went to the families of the boys on the team, and then to the members of our staff, and then to people in the school corporation, then to season ticket holders. By that time they were all gone.

On Saturday night after we had won the Regional, about 1:30 in the morning, I got a call. It was from Chicago. It was an alumnus of Garfield and he said, "Jim, ol' boy, it's wonderful to win that and go to the state finals. You haven't lost any games." And he said, "Now, I'm gonna need two tickets."

I told him, "Well, here's our rules and regulations; those tickets will all be gone. There won't be . . ."

"Now wait a minute," he said, "I'm clear up here, and I want to see that final. I want those two tickets."

I said, "Well, there's no way in the world you can have 'em."

He said, "You mean that?"

CONOVER: I said, "Yes."

He said, "You S.O.B." and bang went the receiver. And I thought to myself, "Well, trying to get to the games when you have championship material can cause people to do a lot of things that they regret later on." 'Cause this man did. He apologized later, but he wanted those tickets so badly that time. And we had a man come in and try to tell Mr. Jones he was the father of one of the boys on the team, and he wasn't (laughs) even related to him! -- to get tickets.

Aw, it's strange. I have a feeling that any team that went to the state finals had somewhat similar experiences.

That was really a great year though. But we never did let those youngsters feel they were any better than anybody else in the school. And they appreciated it, as I said earlier, and so did the students in the school.

HF: You had some experiences with a very famous musician, too, that was from Terre Haute, isn't that right? Who was also a north-ender, Claude Thornhill?

CONOVER: Oh, Claude. Well, this experience was a little different than most people would have.

Mr. Zimmerman was principal and Claude had been missing school on Wednesday afternoons, one Wednesday a month. Well after about three months, the dean discovered that Claude wasn't in school on Wednesdays. So he went in to Mr. Zimmerman and told him. He said, "Well, he's hoppin' school." He said, "We can't let him get away with that."

Mr. Zimmerman told me about it. I said, "Well, you don't know what he's doing?" 'Cause he lived just four blocks from Garfield. And he said, "No." I said, "Well, all right, Wednesday afternoon I'll show you."

So came Wednesday; Claude was gone; he tricked. And we walked up to near Claude's home. About a block away Mr. Zimmerman heard the piano playing, and he knew Claude loved to play the piano. We got about a half block from the house,

CONOVER: and Mr. Zimmerman stopped, and he said, "That's Claude, isn't it?" I said, "Yes." I said, "His mother goes to Ladies Aid Society meeting that one Wednesday each month." And I said, "That's when he goes home and plays the piano." (laughs)

He stood there a minute and he said, "Well, if he loves music that much, I'm not going to kick him out of school." And we went back to school. (more laughter)

That's an actual happening of a man who loved music more than he did anything else.

HF: And went on to become real famous.

CONOVER: Yes. We had a number of people from Garfield that became famous. And the strange thing about it -- nearly all of them came from around Collett Park. Nearly all of them lived within four or five blocks of Collett Park.

Leroy Wilson, the youngest president of AT&T, lived just a block away from Collett Park. Maynard Wheeler lived less than a block away. Paul Rhoads, who became an outstanding doctor in the field of medicine, he lived just down 8th Street about three blocks. A number of those people lived right around Collett Park. Somebody used to say, well it must be the water around there that does it. But what I think did it -- and I've thought it over many times -- I think it was the fact that the faculty did a real good job in educating /and motivating/ those people. They were all pretty good scholars. Members of the staff took interest in those people, and they got them started right on their careers in college and universities. I'm sure it wasn't the water, but I feel Garfield had something. See that Spirit of 7-6 permeated the atmosphere around the school continually. And once you felt it, you became addicted to it -- the Spirit of 7-6. You felt it was part of your life; that when the chips were down, you had to do your best. You didn't give up. A good example of how that spirit gets into the thinking of people -- we used to experiment a lot and we wrote to 20 graduates of our school -- top students who were in college for two or three years -- and asked them if they had the experience to do over in Garfield, would

CONOVER: there be something that they would want that they didn't get when they were in school. Seven of them said, "We'd like to have failed at something." Seven of them. "We would like to have failed at something." These were all top students -- people. They hadn't had that experience of knowing how to meet failure which I think nearly everybody in this world has met at some time or another. They were perfectly frank; they just hadn't had that kind of experience. But I think the Spirit of 7-6 would have come out and helped them if they did face that. And that spirit means a lot more than a football game on a Saturday or Thanksgiving afternoon. It's something that's in the lives of the people.

HF: With your background that you've had in education, sports, and so forth, have we lost some things like that -- in your opinion?

CONOVER: I think -- and unfortunately we should have learned from the Great Depression -- that there are real valuable things in this world, and you just don't have to have everything at your fingertips. But too many young people who went through that [the Depression] when they had families said to themselves, "Well, my boy or my girl is never going to be denied anything. I'm going to see that they have everything 'cause I remember when we didn't have enough to eat, when we didn't have clothes. I don't want that to happen to them." So they made life too easy for them. Unwittingly, unintentionally, but that's what they did.

We now have a society in this country the majority of which feels, "I'm gonna have an easy tolerance of anything unless it bothers me." That [philosophy] has gotten us into trouble. For instance, recently -- and I think I've talked to you about this, Harry -- a young couple wanting to borrow money to finance a home has now accepted the idea that inflation is a way of life. [There is] nothing to worry about because automatically our incomes will be increased to take care of inflation. That's another example of this easy tolerance of what's going on. I think we have to come back to self-discipline; I think we've got to come back to have values; we've got to establish

CONOVER: real values in this country if we're going to keep our place in the sun. Too many people said, "Well, we're God's chosen people." It's pretty evident that God didn't choose people to place 'em up on a pedestal. I think God chose people to produce and prove what they were worth and what they merit. We need to come back and merit what we have in this country.

HF: Then you think the Spirit of 7-6 has a place yet?

CONOVER? Well, I'm sure the Spirit of 7-6 would help every human being that would accept it, because it didn't stand for mediocrity; it didn't stand for easy compromise; it said it's up to you as an individual to produce and merit what you get and what you had.

HF: How about the present role of athletics in schools and colleges as compared to years ago? This has changed radically.

CONOVER: It was beginning to change (laughs) back when I was at Garfield. I think not many people know that Clyde Lovellette was a pretty good baseball pitcher but he lost eligibility to play his senior year because a nationally-known basketball coach violated ethics and invited Clyde to his campus and paid his expenses which was not allowed by the State Athletic Association.

END OF SIDE ONE

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

CONOVER: I was asked by the Chamber of Commerce to call Leroy Wilson when he was president of AT&T 'cause they didn't think he'd come to Terre Haute. I called him, and when I said, "The city would like to recognize you, and I hope you can be here and come to Garfield High School."

He said, "I'll come -- I've only got a couple of dates but I'll come." And you know, he was in demand, and they wouldn't believe me that he'd said that over the phone. I don't know why they wouldn't

CONOVER: write him a letter and ask him, but they wouldn't; they asked me if I'd call him. 'Course, he and my brother were pals all through high school and Rose. Anyway, he called me back and had two dates. And then he said, "I'd also like to go to Rea School." That's where he was in elementary. He went to Rea and then to Garfield. When he went to Rea (laughs), he went back, and he said, "There's one desk. I want to sit there." And he went back, and he sat at that desk. It must have been 15 minutes he sat in that desk that he was in . . . (laughs)

HF: How about other people who you recall that came back or stayed in Terre Haute? Who were they?

CONOVER: Well, I think Paul Humphrey is an outstanding example of a person that appreciated the fact that he got an education in Terre Haute. Paul could have gone almost wherever he wanted to once he had completed his training and his experiences after university and college. But he wanted to come back to his home town, because he said, "I owe this to my community." I think we all know Paul has been a definite asset to this community. He served as president of the first school board on reorganization. He has backed any worthwhile civic program in our community. Now, it's that spirit that is good for this community. He didn't have to come back here. He could have gone and probably /would have been/ financially better off to go other places, but that wasn't Paul's attitude. That was part of that Spirit of 7-6 that he had. We've had other people come back and want to stay in this community. 'Course we understand that by the very nature of our business, our industry today, that most of our young people can't stay here. If they want to improve themselves, they're going to have to go where the corporation or the industry says they go. And yet we still have in this community outstanding examples of people who want to stay and help the community.

HF: In your long athletic career I know there must be more anecdotes about the athletes that you've had experiences with. I wonder if you'd tell us about some of them?

CONOVER: Well, one that I'll (laughs) . . . to me is about as humorous as can be. There was Bill Nichols (I think a lot of people remember Bill). Bill wasn't very tall. He started an electric business after he got out of high school. But Bill was with three or four of his friends the night before the Thanksgiving Day game. And Denny Cummins [was] a friend of his. [Denny's] sister was having a party at her home. And Denny told Bill, "You know on the back porch there's a five-gallon can of ice cream there. They're gonna have it for the party."

Bill and some of his friends stole the ice cream and went over behind McLean school and were eating the ice cream. The party discovered the ice cream was gone [and] called the police. The police went over and caught 'em behind McLean school eating the ice cream. So they told 'em they were going to have to take them down to jail. And Bill Nichols said, "Well, you can't take me down!" "Why not?" [they asked.] "I'm the Garfield quarterback!" "Well," they said, "What's that got to do with it? We're from Wiley," the two policemen [said.] Well, Bill didn't know what to say when, after a while, they left, and they said, "Well, you'd better take it back," because the sister of one of the boys that was there was the one that complained, see. Well, Bill was full of pep, full of energy, but he was the Garfield quarterback and that made it different!

There were a lot of interesting things that happened. One of the real interesting things that didn't have to do with athletics [was this.] In the early days when I was at Garfield I happened to be up in the office and the lady who was the school secretary answered the phone. I could hear her talking. When she replaced the receiver, she started laughing and said, "Well, we're gonna have some fun tomorrow." I said, "What happened?" She said, "That was Bernard Sweeney, you know what he said to me? He said, 'Bernard Sweeney can't come to school today; he's ill.'" And she said, "Well, who's this talking?" [He] said, "It's Bernard Sweeney's father." No -- "This is my father." I'm sorry, I got it all messed up.

HF: That's all right.

CONOVER: He said, "This is my father." Well, he got a warm welcome when he came to school the next day.

There were many things in athletics. I remember the Thanksgiving morning that Earl Pike and I went over to Garfield to get the uniforms out for the football game, and the uniforms weren't there. They'd been stolen. We didn't know what had happened. We never did find out exactly who stole them, but Earl was able to call Indiana State, and they loaned us their uniforms. We were fortunate to have good friends at Indiana State.

HF: So you played the game in the Indiana State uniforms?

CONOVER: That's right.

Another time we -- and I might as well tell you who this was Harry Bear was a very enthusiastic alumnus of Garfield High School. And he was a little worried about the spirit of the Garfield team that particular year, because they hadn't won too many games and were going to play Wiley. His father and uncle were in a manufacturing business, and they used yellow stationery in their business. So he got a lot of this stationery -- blank sheets. He wrote letters to the parents of the boys on Garfield's team and signed each letter with the name of a boy on the Wiley team calling the son of these parents "yellow." Well, that really burned the parents up. The next day when Garfield went out to play Wiley, every time a Garfield boy would hit a Wiley boy real hard in a tackle or a block, he'd say, "Call me 'yellow,' will ya?" And Wiley didn't even know what it was all about. (laughter) Now, that's how far they'll go sometimes to try to build up enthusiasm.

HF: Any others you can recall?

CONOVER: Well, there are so many of them (laughs) that it's always been fun. Really, in my experience at Garfield the coaches always felt that if the boys didn't enjoy it, it wasn't worth the effort. So this has been something of real value.

CONOVER: I remember we had a boy that was a real good lineman. And Earl and I used to go uptown the night before the game if we played a game on Saturday afternoon (which we did in those days -- there weren't lights) to see if any of the boys were uptown. And we saw one of our boys in front of a theater uptown with a cigar in his mouth. So the next day when we went down to play Sullivan, Earl Pike wouldn't let this boy dress. And he the player didn't know why, and Earl said, "I saw you last night with that cigar."

Well, his father and mother had gone down to the game and between halves they got ahold of their son and wanted to know why it was that he wasn't playing. And he said, "Well, Mr. Pike didn't want to play me today, I'm better than any of the other linemen they have; he wanted to give the other boys a chance to try out." That was his alibi. (chuckle)

HF: You had some experiences I think with Olympic winner Greg Bell, too. Would you tell us about that?

CONOVER: Well, Greg Bell was having a difficult time. His mother was trying to rear, I think, eight or nine children. And Greg was just fortunate to be in school all the time that he was in high school.

I can remember when he first came out for track at Garfield High. I was not coaching then. I happened to go back of the building, and I remember he was out there running. We had a very poor place to practice broad jump, but he was practicing, and I got a low hurdle out there and had him jump over it just to get his height out there. He enjoyed that. He was good. He won second place in the broad jump in the state meet his senior year. He had first place -- had broken the State record -- but on the last jump a boy, I believe from Muncie, jumped one-half inch farther than Greg and won it.

When Greg got out of high school, he had to work. He had to do everything he could. He finally got into service. When he went to Europe, he got into the track meets that they had. The boys in

CONOVER: service were in track meets in Europe. Instead of running around -- chasing around -- on weekends, he'd go study art. He visited churches. He was learning a lot of what would help him later on in life plus his efforts in track and field. He won all the championships he was in in Europe in the broad jump.

When he came back here . . . I think Dr. William G. Bannon had something to do with Bell's going to I.U. Indiana University.

I remember when he first went down to I.U., he got into art work, and he made good grades there. I think he had straight A's. But when he went over East in the summertime to participate in track and field, he learned that it was going to be difficult, because of his color to get a job in one of the really top art fields. When he came back -- a counselor had worked with him at I.U. -- he decided to get into the field of dentistry. That's how he got into dentistry.

He was one of the cleanest cut persons I ever knew. He was a very modest person in every way. Even with his winning the Olympics, and when we had him back to Garfield, there was nothing in his behavior except that I'm just one of you. I'm just fortunate to win this.

His mother was very devout. I remember her calling me the night before he was to jump in the Olympics. I believe it was in Tokyo. And she said would I pray for Greg. She was very religious, very devout. I said, "Yes." Well, she said, "Don't pray for him to win. Pray for him to do his best 'cause that's the way Greg would want it." Now, that was the attitude of his mother, and that was Greg's attitude. I said no wonder a boy like that became a world's champion. But I said life has not been too easy for him, and we all understand why. He's a fine human being, if there ever was one.

HF: There was a fire, wasn't there that a . . . ?

CONOVER: Oh, we had a terrific fire at Garfield. It burned out that center part of the building.

HF: When was that?

CONOVER: [19]34 I believe. I was over at West's drug store on a Saturday evening. [I was] talking to Mr. Zimmerman. And some boy came in and said the building's on fire.

Well, we ran over there, and smoke was coming out of it. It was terrible. Mr. Zimmerman had the key to the basement door. We opened that basement door, and the smoke was beginning to pour into the basement. Boy, we ran up the stairs to the office. And then he saw how bad it was getting, and I said, "Well, you go down and go across the street and see if you can get a ladder." He wanted to save the records. The fire was in the auditorium at that time, and it wasn't out into the office area or the halls. He got a ladder at a home right across the street. I got the records out, and he'd climb up that ladder and then take 'em down. We saved all the school records. 'Course I'm quite sure later on there were some people [who] wished we hadn't saved some of those records. (laughter)

But it burned out the entire center of the building. To show you [community spirit] everyone in the north end rallied to try to help us out. We were just out of school one day. The fire was on Saturday, and we went back to school on Tuesday. We had classes at Collett school; at Lange school; at Maple Avenue Methodist church (the whole basement was turned over); [and] the annex. We had "doghouses" built behind the building. We called them "doghouses." They'd been put up there to take care of an overflow of students. We had five of those. They were filled with students. So we were able to continue school. We weren't able to get back into [the] school [building] until right before Thanksgiving Day that fall.

And that year when we got back into school was another one of those years we beat Wiley 7 to 6. (laughs)

HF: Anything else that you recall from your days at Garfield?

CONOVER: Well, Garfield was always innovative.

HF: You mentioned something about magazine drives? Raising money . . .

CONOVER: Yes. We had a program. We believed in sharing with the students. The rules for the school -- the students and the faculty together wrote them, and accepted them and they voted on them.

We were needing things the students would like to have. The students always expressed what they felt their needs were. And we found a way that we could do something about it -- a magazine drive. We could make some money and buy some things we needed. But we knew that if we were going to have a magazine drive, the only way to do it would be if it became part of the educational experience of the youngsters.

The magazine drive was initiated through the homerooms. At that time each student was in a homeroom or in a club 30 minutes each day. So we used two homeroom periods to take care of the magazine drive. We used one of them the first day of the drive to distribute the forms for subscriptions to magazines and explain what they were to do, and then one at the end to wind it up.

We started out the first few years We explained you approached somebody, introduced yourself, tell them where you go to school and that you're trying to raise funds for some purpose within the school. If they turn you down, you thank them and express your thanks for their interest. And, of course, if they buy, you express it.

It wasn't long until we had a 97% participation in the drive by students. We never had more than 3% that refused to participate. We got to the place we were earning several thousand dollars a year. We bought the first intercom system in any school in Terre Haute and had it installed in our school. We bought the first television set. We bought the first hi-fi, so the youngsters could come back to school at 12:30 (at noon) and dance in the halls.

CONOVER: We bought the first real fine scoreboards in a gym in Terre Haute for our gymnasium. We bought the first water coolers in Terre Haute for drinking water. We'd drink that hot water out of those faucets before, and the youngsters really appreciated it.

But the pupils decided what the money was to be used for. Five years before our fiftieth anniversary I suggested to the student council and to the students that maybe we ought to start saving some money for the fiftieth anniversary. They put a thousand dollars by each year for five years and had that money available for the fiftieth anniversary. If it hadn't been for that, we wouldn't have had the kind of celebration we had.

No, the students really were wonderful. I also remember our drive to raise funds to landscape the building -- the ground in front of the building. The youngsters wanted to participate in this. They used the landscaping as a memorial to those who had lost their lives in World War II. And because it was a memorial to those who had lost their lives, our students protected that landscaping. We didn't have vandals. The youngsters would watch it, and they believed in taking care of it. We feel that the youngsters learned a lot out of those extracurricular activities.

HF: Now how long did that go on? I mean how many years?

CONOVER: I think it went on 'til the school . . . 'til the end of Garfield High School. Well, it meant too much. We started many things in the school that later on the school corporation bought for the other schools. But it was the youngsters that wanted it, and they knew that if they got out there and worked for it, they'd have those things.

So they learned a lot out of it. On two or three different occasions I had patrons of the school or neighbors call me and say, "Who was that young lady that came over wanting a magazine subscription? I turned her down but she was so nice, I thought it over. I want to subscribe." Well, then I'd try to find out who went there and send 'em back. They learned Every youngster . . .

CONOVER: every person is a salesman at some time or other, so they were learning how to sell themselves, which you have to do.

HF: Colorful years in education, right?

CONOVER: Well, I think maybe because we had young teachers to start with -- because we had to start out from scratch -- that we appreciated the opportunities that youngsters should have to learn to live lives. Now, we never minimized the importance of the curriculum -- the academic curriculum . . . how important it was.

We began to appreciate what vocational education meant 'way early. Because we knew that many youngsters would have to go out and earn their livelihood that way.

One of the things we did through our clubs -- and we had at one time about 25 clubs at Garfield high school . . . a new teacher came to Garfield named Walt Engle -- chemistry. And the first year /1958/ he was there he said, "Do you think we could start a radio club?" /I replied, / "I don't see why we can't." He had an oversubscription to his club (laughs) right away 'cause radio in those days was important.

He was able to develop the first licensed radio program, I believe, in any of the schools -- maybe in the state of Indiana. And FCC licensed him. That station is still in existence today -- still operating at North high school. And many youngsters learned about radio through that experience through that radio club.

HF: Now how was that used? Just for emergencies? Or did they broadcast regularly?

CONOVER: I can't be sure about that. I do think there were two or three times they used the station when we had emergencies. But I do know a lot of youngsters bought their own sets later on because of it. The magazine drive paid for that station!

See, that's another one of the things When the youngsters wanted something, they would say, "Well, you sell the magazines this year. You take the money; you buy it." And they did.

CONOVER: We initiated many programs before the school corporation ever initiated them in the rest of the schools. And while we were doing it, we learned a lot about life, too.

I always felt that the purpose of the school is to learn to live a life. I remember that we had youngsters who won national contests. We had the first national science winner. And this young lady became interested because we had a teacher who was willing to spend Saturdays, hours after school, with youngsters interested in projects. That was Harry Wunker. And Karen Gabbert was the first national science winner. Karen Gabbert, I'm sure, at that time never dreamed she'd have a Doctor of Philosophy degree, but she went on and earned her Doctor of Philosophy degree, because she got interested in that extracurricular activity. We had this happen to many of our students.

HF: You mentioned manual training, too. That was a field that opened up quite a bit.

CONOVER: Well, it became, probably, more important to some people than the real curricular activities that we'd had in the past. It got to the place . . . I remember when they started Gerstmeier. Gerstmeier, before they started at 13th and Locust was over at 7th and Third Avenue /not named Gerstmeier then/. It had a print shop and one or two other activities. When it moved to 13th and Locust, I'm sure Wiley and Garfield lost many students that wanted to go down to take purely vocational activities. One of the first things that Garfield had in the way of vocational education in the early days was a print shop. We lost it later on. We also had what we called manual training where youngsters could maybe take a year's work in woodwork or in mechanical drawing. Orville Jones had mechanical drawing. I remember several of his graduates went to universities to study architecture. But there was very little of it in those early days.

I remember when the North Central Association frowned on it but eventually came up with a life adjustment program. I 'member some of the principals would say to the North Central Chairman in Indiana who didn't believe in it, "Well, what is vocational

CONOVER: education but life adjustment?" But he couldn't see that. It took years to finally convince /school authorities/ that the schools ought to have well-rounded programs for all youngsters.

HF: Very colorful past. We certainly want to . . .

CONOVER: Oh, well, if it hadn't been for struggles, it wouldn't be worth the effort (laughs). When you have success, you feel pretty good about some of those things.

We've been very fortunate in having Boards of Education and superintendents that understood the real needs. Once they were demonstrated, they backed us up, and it's that sort of attitude that makes those who are out working on the firing line feel that their efforts are respected and worthwhile too. I have never believed in having strict, fast rules that the teacher had to follow under all circumstances, because I think that tends toward mediocrity. If they have freedom for their own initiative, that's when they produce. We had teachers at Garfield that got national recognition.

Helen Ross had a project in civics where she took classes down to the City Hall and to /City/ Council meetings and got an ordinance passed for no smoking in our department stores. Those youngsters learned through that experience.

Then a little later on they had a negative experience. They tried to get our water fluoridated. But they lost that one because there were groups organized that were stronger than they were. But they learned how things are done.

Inez Kelly, who was a fine math teacher . . . Inez Kelly, through her math club, started projects in that club /that were/ even above what many universities and colleges were teaching. It got national acclaim /and/ was published by the federal government as an outstanding program.

So, because they had the freedom to initiate the things that were worthwhile, it was great. I remember when Grace DeVaney wanted a family living class. She said youngsters needed to know how to live in a family, because she'd been up against a

CONOVER: few that had rough times in their families. We didn't have too many of them, but she'd learned what they were as dean of girls. We had to write to the state Board of Education, give an outline of what the program would be, and then for two years we had to send in an evaluation of what happened in the program. Well, after two years we got full approval, but she had the first Family Living class in high school in Indiana.

And I remember when we got the federal ruling you couldn't have prayers in the schools. We had our intercom class. We had a Hi-Y club and a Y-Teens club. Well, anyway, they had the two clubs furnished youngsters each Monday morning to say a few words of prayer over the intercom to start the school week. When the federal government ruled against it, they the youngsters didn't want to give the program up. And, to show you how kids think it out, the next fall after that ruling came out we had a teacher that was dedicated . . . well, as a matter of fact, her brother became one of the national leaders in the Methodist church -- Leroy Smyres. He was the first student enrolled in Garfield when they opened the doors. His sister taught at Garfield, in social studies. She started a class in Bible study. That was legal but you could not have prayers in the school.

Some of the students out of her class came in and said, "Well, we know how to handle this thing. We will study and give quotations from scripture out of works of literature." And that's what they did. They dug 'em out. The girls would give it one week and the boys the next. They never did give up on that first morning. That shows how youngsters will do things when they have initiative and have the opportunity, the freedom to do it. Oh, I enjoyed working with those youngsters and with those faculties. And parents My goodness, we had dedicated people up there.

HF: Any other faculty members you can recall that gave you the same feeling?

CONOVER: Marie Latta was a social studies teacher. When we decided we wanted to landscape the front of the

CONOVER: building, she said, "Well, we're going to have to have an income to continue it -- to maintain this landscaping." And she started what's called the Tulip Trek -- on Memorial Day. We had two big urns placed on the stage. We had students that would . . . give the names of the boys (and we had one woman in the early days) who lost their lives during the war. And that was a memorial to them. Every student had an opportunity to drop something in those urns. Most of them put at least a dime in and some put much more. And that was the way they were able to maintain the landscaping and keep it up in front of the building. That was her contribution -- special contribution.

Teachers were always willing. If we had the school plays . . . as a matter of fact, we used to have faculty plays. The kids loved those. They'd come so they could laugh at their teachers. (laughs) Oh, we had so many different things going on. And yet through it all, we maintained that requirement of scholastic progress and When I went up as principal, I did have a little concern. I could feel a sort of a dividing line between the academic people and those who believed in the co-curricular including athletics and the band and the choir, etc. So, I knew we had to somehow get them back together, and I said to the faculty I feel that both sides of this are important to the youngsters' experiences while they're in school. And I'm going to make a request. You know our boys have to be eligible in athletics, so every week each boy on the football team will bring around to you a card to show whether he's passing in your subject, and you'll mark whether he is or not. And we did that in basketball.

Well, before the year was over they began to see that the coaches wanted 'em to pass as well as the teacher in the academic end of it. And after about two years of having to mark those grades on there every week, the teachers (laughs) that hadn't been interested in athletics and the co-curricular program said, "Look. We know that they want them to make their grades." So we stopped it. But from that time on in, they respected each other's efforts, and it works.

CONOVER: I think sometimes this happens in schools, that some teachers think athletics interfere. Well, I'm afraid in some schools it does, but that spirit never got into the feeling and thinking up at Garfield.

HF: You mentioned flowers a while ago. I think that must have been where you got your interest in growing various flowers. In school, right?

CONOVER: 'Course I had a background in flowers. My mother's family was Ed Cowan's -- brothers that had a florist shop. But I wasn't interested. I got my first real interest in the fourth grade. Sally Dawson was a teacher, and she loved nature. And she'd take her class after school -- both in the fall and in the spring -- up the towpath. Up near where the Elks Country Club is, they used to have a towpath. And she'd point out the different birds to us and so on.

But I remember one spring I think the most beautiful color I ever saw in my life was when she pointed out the bluebells -- Virginia Mertensia, Virginia bluebell, commonly known as Virginia cowslip. That blue is the most beautiful color. Well, I became interested in growing plants then.

And then when she came to Garfield, she continued that. She'd take her classes after school in the fall and in the spring on hikes, and they'd learn a lot about it. And I feel that had a lot to do with my learning about But I learned to hybridize iris and day lilies early. I used to write to the outstanding hybridizer in the world.

I had an experience one time with Hans P. Sass. He was one of the top hybridizers. His brother and he had many acres of land in Nebraska. And the people throughout the country were trying to find out what plants he used for pollination of the iris. And I wrote and said, "I've sent you five dollars a year for several years. I'm a school teacher. I don't have much money, but I love iris. I've wondered what you use for cross-pollination."

CONOVER: I got a letter back from him on yellow paper, lined. He typed it, and he started the sentence with small letters. His first sentence was, "how's the corn in Indiana?" And then he said, "now, I'm sending you under separate cover five iris plants. you use Midwest Gems for yellow." And then he named them -- what I should use for pollen. And he was right. I've still got today, one of the yellows that I started with that early pollination from those plants.

I had sent him five dollars. And I looked up the catalog value of the plants. It was eighty-seven dollars and a half. He saw I was genuinely interested. Well, later on that man and his wife were visited by a man from Ohio State University who used to write the Diary of the Plain Dirt Gardener. And this man took his family (his two sons) up there to visit Hans P. Sass and his wife. At that time Hans P. Sass was 80 years old; his wife was 78 years old. They lived in a very large house. They had no servants. That lady was taking care of that house by herself, and she insisted they stay for dinner. And they said, "Oh, no. We can't do that!" She went out and killed four chickens and prepared the best dinner they ever had. He included (this man from Ohio State) that story in his Diary of a Plain Dirt Gardener.

Well, this gives you an idea of pioneering. People dedicated their lives to worthy things. I'm just wondering if maybe in our quest for things today in this country -- to have things so easy, so readily accessible -- if we're not missing some of the real values in life. Just think of that man and his wife up there with the large home and a great farm and his concern, and he still had empathy with people who had fellow interests. I have a feeling we're missing something. I think we need to go back to a little of it.

HF: Thank you very much, James Conover. This has been an interview for the Oral History program with James Conover of Terre Haute. This is Harry E. Frey.

END OF TAPE

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